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Eulogy: Esther Carapella

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Recommended Citation

Miner '56, Roger J., "Eulogy: Esther Carapella" (1999). *Memorials and Eulogies*. 11.
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EULOGY -- ESTHER T. CARAPELLA

November 19, 1999

Less than six months ago, we mourned the passing of John Carapella, and now we mourn the passing of his beloved wife, Esther. The sense of loss and sadness that we all feel is almost unbearable, but we are comforted by the knowledge that both of them will always be with us in our hearts and in our memories and that they will be with each other for all eternity.

Esther Carapella was born on June 4, 1913 at her parents' residence on Sullivan Street in New York City. Her parents were Eugene and Mary Mariani. She moved to Mount Vernon as a child and grew up there with two brothers, Ralph and Maurice, and a sister, Theresa, all of whom predeceased her. She went to school in Mount Vernon and shared with her siblings many happy childhood experiences that she enjoyed talking about in her later years. She helped her parents in the Mariani family business -- a grocery and later a luncheonette -- that was a fixture in Mount Vernon for 49 years. After the death of her beloved parents, she and her sister ran the business until 1968, when they sold it. That same year, Aunt Esther and Uncle John acquired the house in Eastchester that was to be their home for the next 31 years.

So Esther's entire business career outside the home was spent in the family business known as "Nonno's Store," except for one day, the events of which I shall now relate. It seems that, at some time in her youth, Esther agreed to work for Woolworth's 5 & 10 cent store during the Christmas season. As she stood

behind the counter, a friend came in and some glass ball tree ornaments were examined. In some unknown manner, a number of these balls fell to the floor and shattered into many pieces. Aunt Esther put on her coat, left the store, accepted no pay for the day's work and never looked back.

It was only a short time ago that I stood in this place and spoke of the meeting of John Carapella and Esther Mariani, of their romance and marriage, of their joint honeymoon with Anthony and Elsie Bruno and of their 61 years of marriage through good times and bad. After giving my eulogy for Uncle John, I asked Aunt Esther what was the secret of success over such a long married life. Aunt Esther said: "I took care of the small things and Uncle John took care of the big things. It's just that no big things ever came up." That put me in mind of the advice given to me by my father-in-law, Esther's brother Ralph. He said: "Whoever thinks marriage is a 50-50 proposition doesn't know women or fractions."

Family was the defining factor in Aunt Esther's life. People today talk about family values as if it is something new. Esther practiced family values all her life, and they are reflected in the lives of her children, her grandchildren and her great grandchildren and in the lives of many others in her extended family. She had three children of her own -- Theresa, Carol and John in that order -- and lavished much attention and love upon them as they grew up. But she also lavished much love and attention upon her nieces and nephews and frequently

performed babysitting duties for her brothers and sister. She often cared for her siblings' children as well as her own when the family made its frequent trips to the Mariani Farm in the country. This family closeness enabled Aunt Esther to teach by precept and example the values that she held most dear: love, faith, tolerance, integrity, charity, honesty, fidelity, compassion, responsibility and selfless devotion.

But the teachings of Aunt Esther's life did not stop with her children and the children of her siblings. It carried over to the next generation -- to her grandchildren, Danny, Carol Ann and Melissa, the children of Theresa, and to Lindsay and Johnny, the children of son John. It carried on into yet another generation as Aunt Esther was able to spend quality time babysitting and teaching her great-granddaughter Samantha, Melissa's daughter, and her great-grandson Carter, Danny's son.

But Aunt Esther's influence did not only extend to her descendants. It was felt among the children of her nieces and nephews and their spouses and children as well. My wife Jackie, Aunt Esther's niece, often has spoken of the help, physical and moral, that Aunt Esther provided as she faced the perils of child raising. And thus has Aunt Esther's spirit pervaded an entire family. But it does not end there either. Aunt Esther and her husband have had a lifelong circle of friends, including the Brunos, the Vinocurs and many more. Aunt Esther always has taken an interest in their children and their childrens' children, and her spirit thus pervades her extended circle of friends as much

as it does her extended family.

Aunt Esther was always fiercely protective of family and friends. She certainly gave advice in no uncertain terms, including to her husband, when advice was due. But she always came to the defense of all who were in her orbit. Aunt Esther would never allow any negative comments about her family and friends from outsiders. Yet, her main concern always was the welfare of others. Only a few hours before she passed away, she spoke with my wife by telephone from her hospital bed. She told Jackie to take care of her cold. Aunt Esther was the sun around which the other planets rotated, picking up the light of wisdom and goodness that she radiated.

In newspaper articles about the 60th Anniversary of John and Esther, it was reported that Esther Carapella enjoyed crocheting, watching TV talk shows and following the Mets baseball team. (I am sure that she was disappointed that the Mets didn't make it this year.) However, I thought that the article missed the most important part of the story. Aunt Esther was not about crocheting, talk shows and the Mets. Her life was spent doing the greatest work of all. It was spent in showing to all of us lucky enough to rotate around her the way to a moral, worthwhile and therefore successful life. That is her legacy to us, and that is how we will always remember this very special woman.